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DOMESTIC RABBITS FOR FUR AND MEAT.

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A radio interview between Mrs. Rowena Schmidt Carpenter and Mrs. Fanny Walker Yeatman, Bureau of Home Economics, and F. G. Ashbrook, Bureau of Biological Survey, delivered through WRC and 39 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, January 29, 1931.

How do you do, Homemakers:

We haven't said a word about good things to eat since we prepared Christmas dinner over the air many weeks ago. Sheets and budgets and children's clothes have kept us busy all this month.

But, let's forget about household and clothing problems today and talk about one of the rare treats in the meat line, something we've been preparing in the Bureau: domestic rabbit meat, delicate in flavor, beautiful in texture, and every inch of it as white as the breast of chicken. If you have never tasted a piece of domestic rabbit, you simply can't know what you have missed. It is like nothing else, quite, though I place it in my list of special favorites along with turkey, capon, and tender chicken.

My experience with it is all in eating and enjoying it, but Mrs. Yeatman has come along to tell you her choicest methods of preparing domestic rabbit meat. Before you hear from her, though, I believe you'd like to know why Uncle Sam happens to be interested in domestic rabbits. Mr. F. G. Ashbrook who is in charge of the division of fur resources of the Bureau of Biological Survey is the best person to tell you that. Mr. Ashbrook, how did the government become interested in domestic rabbits?

MR. ASHBROOK: Well, the beginning was a good many years ago when it was customary in many localities to keep a few domestic rabbits in a pen in the back yard. These furnished a little meat for the family, just like the back-yard chicken flock. People who raised a few rabbits to eat wanted to know what to do with the skins.

MRS. CARPENTER: So domestic rabbits were raised first, for meat, and the skins were a by-product. I am glad to hear you stress these two commercial values. It seems to me that lots of people think of domestic rabbits as pets, and are simply aghast at the idea of eating them.

MR. ASHBROOK: Yes, I know. Some people feel the same about chickens if they have raised them. But most of us think of the flesh of animals and fowls as food -- in the impersonal way we should. For a long time rabbits have been raised definitely for table use, in this country and even more so in other countries. And in the last five years growing domestic rabbits has become a large and valuable industry in the United States.

MRS. CARPENTER: Are domestic rabbits raised now principally for meat or for fur?

(over)

MR. ASHBROOK: For both. Rabbit fur is used extensively to trim cloth garments and to make coats. Great quantities of rabbit fur go into the making of felt hats. In our rabbit experiment stations we have carried on studies in feeding, breeding and handling rabbits for some years. Special breeding has greatly improved the fur and the meat also. In flavor, color, and texture the meat is so superior to that of the common wild cottontails and to our native hares that there is no comparison.

MRS. CARPENTER: You are certainly right about that, Mr. Ashbrook. I know from first-hand experience. Tell us, though, because I'm sure that many of our friends want to know, can homemakers buy domestic rabbit meat, in any part of the United States?

MR. ASHBROOK: The industry is most highly developed in the Western States where a single large rabbitry may keep several hundred animals. In that section the meat is served regularly in hotels and restaurants as well as in homes. There are smaller rabbit farms scattered throughout the country supplying some domestic rabbit meat all the year round. Of course the demand determines the supply, so if homemakers ask at their favorite markets often enough and long enough, merchants will begin to carry domestic rabbit meat.

MRS. CARPENTER: Thank you very much, Mr. Ashbrook. I wish I could ask you to answer other questions that have come to my mind as we talked, but I am afraid there isn't time, if we give Mrs. Yeatman a chance to tell how she makes this meat taste so delicious. And I am sure you want to hear that, homemakers! How do you do it, Mrs. Yeatman?

MRS. YEATMAN: Easily -- but I can claim very little credit for myself! Domestic rabbit meat is so delicate in flavor, so white, and has such fine texture that it just can't be anything but delicious. We have prepared it in a number of ways, basing our methods on what we know about the cooking of chicken and of meat in general. We find that young, tender, plump rabbits should be fried, or broiled -- that is, cooked quickly at a rather high temperature without any moisture. Since domestic rabbit meat is not very juicy, it is well to hold in every bit of the natural juices in frying. To do this we dipped the individual pieces in a thin batter and then placed them in a hot pan with a few tablespoons of very hot fat. If the fat isn't hot enough, the batter will stick to the pan and pull away from the rabbit. Since we use the batter especially as a coating to hold in the juices, that must not happen. A platter of fried domestic rabbit garnished with parsley and served with milk gravy reminds one of the old southern favorite, fried chicken and cream gravy. But to my mind the all-white, fine-grained meat of the rabbit puts it in the lead.

MRS. CARPENTER: I quite agree with you, fond as I am of fried chicken! Just now in telling about rabbit, you said that it must be young and plump to be suitable for frying or broiling. What would you do with the older ones, less plump and less tender?



MRS. YEATMAN: I'd cook them more slowly at a lower temperature, using some moisture, either water or milk, to make them tender. A heavy metal pan or a glass or earthenware baking dish that holds an even heat is a help too. A casserole of rabbit is a very pretty dish to serve, brought piping hot from the oven -- the tender, somewhat browned pieces of meat partly surrounded by rich gravy. This is very much the same as fricassed chicken, with the individual pieces first seasoned, then dipped in flour and browned in hot fat before they are put in the baking dish with hot water. The preliminary browning develops a fine flavor and color, and helps hold in the flavor during the slow cooking.

MRS. CARPENTER: I see you have told only about your two favorite recipes for rabbit; fried and en casserole. But you fixed it so many ways, all equally good it seemed to us who judged. Won't you tell us about some of the others?

MRS. YEATMAN: Yes, we were successful with domestic rabbit in using every method that we have liked for chicken: rabbit pie, smothered rabbit, rabbit chop suey, rabbit a la king, and rabbit salad. Do you remember how beautiful the rabbit salad was and how good it tasted? All of the meat is so lovely and white, and has such perfect texture that making it into salad is just like using only the breast meat of the finest young hens. Marinated with a little salad oil, vinegar, onion juice, salt and paprika for three or four hours while it stands in a cold place, and then mixed with diced celery, capers, and thick mayonnaise and served on crisp lettuce, it makes a tasty and tempting luncheon dish, delightful with lettuce or shoe string potatoes and hot biscuits. We garnished rabbit salad with olives and radishes to make it especially dressy, but it really needs no special furbishing.

MRS. CARPENTER: You are quite as enthusiastic about domestic rabbit meat as I am, Mrs. Yeatman, and if any of our enthusiasm has carried over to you, homemakers, you will be writing us at once for Leaflet 66, Rabbit Recipes. Directions for frying, broiling and smothering rabbit, for the casserole dish and the salad Mrs. Yeatman described, and for rabbit chop suey and rabbit a la king are all in Leaflet 66 which you may request direct from the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington or from the station over which this program comes to you. If you have questions about rabbit fur, how it wears or how to identify it when you are buying fur trimmed garments, or if you want some suggestions for starting a rabbit farm, write to Mr. F. G. Ashbrook of the Biological Survey Bureau here in Washington. And now, goodbye, until next week, homemakers.

